

2 December 2007
Advent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Counting Down”

Text: Matthew 21:1-11; Romans 13:8-14

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

One of the enjoyable traditions of the Advent season is the use of Advent calendars to count down the days to Christmas. In my house, we have two different kinds: the kind with the little windows that open, one for each day; and also the kind that create a picture of the Bethlehem scene, with a different figure added to complete the picture each day that goes by. They're good. They help us remember and anticipate our Saviour, and sound the warning that time is running out! Time is running out to get things done. To be ready and prepared.

But I wonder . . . what if we had another kind of Advent calendar? One not to count down the days until Christmas, when we remember Jesus' coming in the flesh at Bethlehem – but one to count down the days until Jesus *comes again* in glory! An Advent calendar to count down to the end of time and this world as we know it. How would that change the way we live? Helping us to remember and anticipate our Saviour's return, and sounding the warning that time is running out! That time is running out to get things done. To be ready and prepared. To repent.

That would be a good thing, I think. And it would help us focus on the meaning of this Advent season – that we do not only remember the first coming of our Lord in the flesh at Bethlehem, but that we also remember the second coming of our Lord, when He returns to be our Judge. And remembering, that we ask ourselves: **will we be ready for His coming?**

Jerusalem was not ready, when Jesus rode into her that day, *humble and mounted on a donkey*. She had grown tired of waiting. She had gotten distracted with the problems and issues of the day, and taken her eyes off her Lord. And so she was sick. Sick with sin. Within her walls, the conspirators are conspiring against Him. The betrayer will soon betray Him. The prostitutes and sinners are prostituting and

sinning. The governor refuses to govern rightly. The disciples will soon refuse to follow. The city named for peace will kill the Prince of Peace. The city of God's presence rejects His presence. Yes, she is sick, Jerusalem. And she is dying. But she doesn't even realize it. Life goes on, and business as usual.

Does that sound a bit like our world today? Does it sound like you?

But some *were* looking for Him, and waiting. A faithful remnant. They met Him as He entered the city and cried out *Hosanna! Save us!* They might not have understood why their King was coming in such a humble fashion. They might not even have understood what they needed saving from! Or how He would do it. But they knew things weren't right. They knew their sin. They knew they needed saving. And the promised Son of David had come to save.

And so St. Paul calls out to us today to be the same. To *wake up!* Matthew cries out his *Behold* to get our attention. That we too be a faithful remnant. That we too cry out Hosanna to our coming King, and be ready for His coming on the last day. And we need their voices, for we have no Advent calendar to count down the last days. We do not know how many days are left. St. Paul issues his warning: *salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed.* There may not be that many little windows left to open.

And so St. Paul tells us, don't wait! Don't assume you have plenty of time – get ready! Repent and *cast off the works of darkness* now, he says. . . . And so how ironic that it is this very time of year that seduces us right into those things St. Paul warns us about! Instead of freeing us from the things of this world, the holiday season seems to seduce us into yearning for them. We are encouraged to dive into *orgies* of spending and indulgence; into the *drunkenness* not only of alcohol but of greed; into *sexual immorality*; and *in[to] quarreling and jealousy*, over who got what, and who didn't. And the only end in view for most is the tally of what I got after all the presents are unwrapped. . . . And so it seems that the time when we remember our Lord's first coming might be the *worst* time for His second coming! The time when we are the most distracted, and the least ready.

So how good it is to hear the voice of our King through His prophets and apostles, warning us against the seductive voices of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. Warning us that the little windows are running out. That we need to repent, for our King is coming. And asking: **Will you be ready for His coming?**

But realize: Jesus doesn't ask that question without also providing an answer for you. And the answer is *yes!* Yes, you *will* be ready, for your King is not calling you from afar, and not with a threatening voice, but is coming to you in humility even now, to save and make you ready. For as that day in Jerusalem, He is coming *righteous and having salvation*, to give His salvation to you. And so as Jesus did not reject His sin-sick Bride, but entered Jerusalem that day riding on a donkey, to lay down His life for her, so He does not reject us – but comes to us too. That we be sin-sick no more; that we be love-sick for the idols of this world no more; but that we find our life, our love, and our rest in Him. That we lift up our hearts to heaven, our eyes to the cross, and our hopes and dreams to the life of the world to come. That our faith be not asleep when our Lord comes again, but ready and eager to welcome Him with *our Hosannas!*

And so while we may be knee-deep in our preparation for Christmas (with the tide quickly rising!) – Jesus is calling you today to the waters of Baptism, to repent and not be swallowed up by the distractions of the world, but be drowned in His flood, and be raised to a new life in His forgiveness.

And while we may be caught up in the feasting of this season, and all its parties and joys – Jesus is calling you not to neglect the Feast He has here set for you, of His own body and blood, that in repentance and faith you receive His forgiveness and life and be satisfied and filled not just for a time, but for eternity.

And while our mouths and ears are filled with words and songs of peace – Jesus is calling you to hear His words of peace, as He says to you “*I forgive you all your sins.*” And with that true and *lasting* peace, to join in not just with the carols here and now, but with the song of the angels in Heaven.

And these gifts are the real Christmas gifts; true and lasting gifts, that He was **born** to give, that He **died** to give, and that He **rose** to give. That you too who are born and die, would also rise again and live with Him. That the “window” open for you be not just the little countdown window of an Advent calendar, but the very window into Heaven.

So while we may not be able to count down the days until the end, that's okay – our Lord is counting. Counting days – not sins – and making you ready. So that we pray with confidence: “*Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come!*” For if “Jesus is the Reason for the [Christmas] Season,” *Hosanna* is the Reason for Advent Season.

Hosanna! Come, Lord Jesus. Come, and save us now.

In the name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.